

## **1. Executive Summary**

### **a. Project title: Floodplain Acquisition, Management, and Monitoring on the Sacramento River**

**Applicants:** The Nature Conservancy, the California Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### **b. Project description and primary biological/ecological objectives**

The co-applicants request \$3,545,800 for the *acquisition and management* of fee title or permanent conservation easement interests on floodplain lands within the Conservation Area (as defined by SB 1086) of the Sacramento River between Keswick and Verona. We will also develop a new project-wide *floodplain restoration monitoring program* to enhance existing monitoring programs. This application builds on a similar application submitted to CALFED in 1997. These acquisitions will facilitate the recovery of ecological processes within the floodplain, including the regeneration of native riparian habitat. The primary objectives of the project are to:

- Protect and increase quality and quantity of an essential spawning, rearing, and migratory pathway for a host of aquatic and terrestrial species.
- Protect large continuous blocks of existing and restorable aquatic and riparian habitat for the benefit of these species.
- Protect and allow for the restoration of ecological processes in the floodplain.
- Reduce flood-related losses by moving economic activity out of floodprone areas.
- Involve and inform local landowners of project plans and progress through the SB 1086 process.

There are twelve CALFED *stressors* described in the Proposal Solicitation Package that are reduced through this project including *physical isolation of the floodplain*, *lack of riparian regeneration potential*, and *elimination of fine sediment replenishment*, to name three. Others are described in Section IV-c. While the proposed project stands alone, it is a companion to a second proposal submitted by the applicants: **Riparian Habitat Restoration on the Sacramento River: Planting, Monitoring, and Demonstration.**

### **c. Approach/tasks/schedule**

**Acquisition** The co-applicants will negotiate the acquisition of fee title or easements on lands in the project area with willing sellers. Our goal is to purchase the most cost-effective interest possible, and achieve permanent protection. Easements will be purchased where feasible. Assuming full funding for this project, we anticipate acquiring fee title or easement on up to 500 acres in the three years following the award of funds. Actual acres acquired will depend upon the price of purchased interests.

We will initiate *start-up stewardship and analysis* activities including clean-up and repair of infrastructure, fencing as needed, analysis of flood management structures, and development of management plans.

**Long-term management** Lands will be conserved in the public interest and be managed as part of the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge, the Sacramento River Wildlife Area, or some other appropriate reserve system consistent with Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and Service policy and procedures.

We will develop and begin implementing project-wide *floodplain restoration monitoring* to assess the success of channel meander and floodplain habitat restoration efforts in achieving multiple CALFED objectives. The plan will be completed by the end of first year following award of funds. Implementation will begin when the plan is completed and will continue for the remaining two years, and possibly beyond depending on availability of additional funding.

The loss and degradation of aquatic and riparian habitat on the Sacramento River have reached critical levels. Shaded riverine aquatic, floodplain, and riparian woodland habitats have declined as human demands on the river's resources have intensified, with associated declines in aquatic and terrestrial species. Anadromous fish, including four genetic races of chinook salmon and steelhead trout, depend upon the river as a migration corridor. Resident fish species, as well as migratory birds and other terrestrial species, also depend on a healthy river corridor. Major flood events, including those in the past two years, have had a significant negative impact on levee integrity, agricultural revenue, and infrastructure in the floodplain. This project, and the larger multi-partner Sacramento River restoration effort of which it is a part, will address these problems.

***e. Budget costs and third-party impacts***

Proposal applicants are requesting \$3,545,800 to protect and manage floodplain lands through fee title or permanent easement acquisition. Budget costs include funds for these task categories: fee title and easement acquisition, and part of the following: start-up stewardship and analysis, long-term operations and management, and floodplain restoration monitoring. Potential third-party impacts, such as displacement of local agriculture, flood impacts, and decrease in the local tax base, are discussed in Section V-c.

***f. Applicant qualifications***

The Nature Conservancy began acquiring land along the Sacramento River in 1988 and has assisted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in acquiring 8,600 acres for conservation in the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge. Since then the Conservancy, in partnership with the Service, has dedicated significant resources to do the following: acquire additional Refuge lands; purchase and hold a 2,950-acre conservation easement; implement large-scale riparian forest restoration; and engage the local community in a wildlife-compatible agriculture program. The WCB has acquired interest in more than 6,700 acres, which are managed by DFG and local partners. In addition, WCB and DFG have overseen active restoration projects affecting more than 400 acres on four sites. The proposed project will continue to build on these acquisition and restoration successes.

***g. Monitoring and data evaluation***

In addition to the project-wide floodplain restoration monitoring program mentioned above, project monitoring and evaluation will be conducted through a number of other programs. Applicants will maintain a chronological record of the amount and types of acreage acquired and will submit quarterly programmatic and financial reports. Other programs are described in Section IV-f.

***h. Local support/coordination with other programs/compatibility with CALFED objectives***

Acquisition lands will be selected according to existing agency guidelines and procedures set forth in applicant management plans, as well as in regional initiatives focused in the project area (e.g., SB 1086). This project is supported by a host of local public and private entities. The project does not conflict with any CALFED objectives, and directly supports those objectives pertaining to ecosystem health and water quality. Its goals are also consonant with existing agency objectives and programs, some of which have provided project funding in the past: the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA), Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, Riparian Habitat Joint Venture (Partners in Flight), Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the US Army Corps of Engineers, and DFG/WCB's Habitat Acquisition and Management Program. This project will be coordinated with local landowners, public agencies and other interested parties through the SB 1086 process.